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The Life of Thomas Hart Benton. By WILLIAM M. MEIGS. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1904. Pp. 533.)

Thomas H. Benton. By JOSEPH M. ROGERS. (Philadelphia: Geo. W. Jacobs and Company. 1905. Pp. 361.)

THE almost simultaneous publication of two important biographies of Thomas H. Benton—only a month between them—is another of the many signs of the rising interest in the formative history of the Middle West. These two volumes not only signify a growing interest in that part of American history, but also show that the general historical reader, as well as the student, is more and more harking back to the origin of things, when ideas and institutions were in the process of becoming what they are now. Without doubt two such studies will stimulate this interest, and will help to give to American readers an abiding interest in the first great trans-Mississippi statesman.

Benton is a character that furnishes an occasion for good writing. Both authors seem to have appreciated this, for there is not a dull page in either book. But Benton's activities were so tremendous and the fruits of his labor so great that he presents a strong temptation to eulogy and hero-worship. Neither author has sinned in this regard, although there runs through each volume an undertone of deep appreciation of Benton's ability and character.

It may truly be said that both authors have dealt with the great deeds accomplished by this masterful man in a most interesting way. The main lines of Benton's career are set out clearly and forcibly; his entry into the Senate; his long fight for the repeal of the salt tax; his championing for years of the policy of giving settlers cheap western lands—the origin of the later Homestead Laws; his part in the rivalry between the East and the South and West; the long bitter fight against the United States Bank and paper money, his incessant effort to secure the attention of the country and the government to the Oregon country, and his splendid faith in its future significance in relation to Asiatic commerce; the gradual break between Benton and the South on slavery and disunion, resulting in his defeat for a sixth term in the Senate; his short career in the House of Representatives; and his unshaken devotion to the Union on the verge of Civil War, are presented quite fully. These great subjects occupy the greater portions of both works. Throughout both volumes interest is heightened by attention to the many interesting and often dramatic episodes in which Benton was involved. Among them are the quarrel and fight with Jackson, duels with Charles Lucas, reconciliation with, and warm friendship for, Jackson; the debates over the expunging resolution; clashes on the floor of the Senate with Clay, Calhoun, and Foote the fire-eater of Mississippi; his last campaign, at over seventy-four years of age, in which Benton travelled over twelve hundred miles and made over forty speeches; and that final scene, the struggle with death to enable him to finish his *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress*. In these scenes the aggressive and fighting elements of Benton's character are well

brought out, and add a spice of human interest which seldom appears in serious biographical writings. Both authors emphasize the tremendous difficulties of prejudice, rival ambitions, and conflicting sectional interests which often stood in Benton's way, and the essentially broad and statesmanlike views and motives which stimulated him to fight till he won. The reader is made to feel that here is an open and manly opponent who called a spade a spade; who faced enemies on the so-called "field of honor", as well as on the stump or in the Senate; who served nearly a generation in the Senate without accumulating wealth; who genuinely served his state and nation and who, in his long career, never directly or indirectly championed the interest of a few against the interests of the many. Both biographies emphasize the wholesome relation which Benton sustained to his constituents, and show that he practised, consciously or unconsciously, the high ideals set forth in Burke's *Address to the Electors of Bristol*. With all its faults Benton's character is made to appear worthy of the study of every American who aspires to participate in local or national politics.

These two lives, however, will not appeal in equal degree to the student of history and to the reader of history. Meigs's was written for the student by a student. Rogers's was written for the general reader by one who writes daily for the general reader, and is a volume of the "American Crisis Biographies". A number of points of contrast will justify this conclusion, at least in part. Meigs contains more frequent and fuller quotations from Benton's speeches and writings and gives exact references to pages and volumes. Rogers not only contains fewer quotations, but has not a single exact reference to a single authority. It is true that in his "Bibliography", Rogers cites general histories and "Reminiscences", but fails to mention any special treatises such as Catterall's *Second Bank*, although he declares that he has used many sources not named. Meigs appeals to the student by a more judicial and critical attitude. He finds several disputed questions difficult to untangle, while Rogers's pen moves right on, as if there were no obstacles in the way and no doubts to raise as to fact and interpretation. The method of approach is strikingly different. Meigs spends more than one hundred and fifty pages in working out what might be regarded as the social and political environment out of which Benton arose, including a very interesting sketch of the men in the Senate in 1821 who exerted a strong influence over him. Benton cannot be understood as the student wishes to understand him, without such a study of early surroundings. Rogers's chapter on Benton's entry into the Senate closes on page 54.

There is hardly an over-statement or a serious error to be found in Meigs. But now and then Rogers will indulge in such statements as the following: "Henry Clay came to the front with his first compromise. It was effected solely through his agency" (p. 32). On the opposite page he declares that "this compromise" (the Missouri Compromise) "was to a great extent the work of Benton". Putting aside

the contradiction in these two sentences, there is considerable history behind each which ought to have produced different statements. Benton of course was not recognized as a Senator and had no right to vote or speak till Missouri was proclaimed a state of the Union. Rogers pronounces Clay "a man of unbridled ambition", "the father of the protective tariff system" and declares that in the Compromise of 1850 "Clay and Calhoun had their way and left a heritage of Civil War to posterity". In this connection he also asserts that President Taylor wished to "try conclusions with the South." Sentences such as these, scattered here and there, force the conclusion that Rogers did not entirely shake off his editorial habit of popular statement when producing a serious historical work. The writing of a biography of Benton for general readers is a serious task, and Rogers has accomplished it.

W. H. MACE.

The Crisis of the Confederacy: A History of Gettysburg and the Wilderness. By CECIL BATTINE, Captain 15th The King's Hussars. (London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Company. 1905. Pp. xv, 424; six maps.)

It is not surprising that the campaigns and battles of the four years' war between the American States, and the careers of the great leaders on the two sides should attract the attention and be the study of military students and critics in other lands. But it is surprising that foreign students and war-critics should give such thorough and careful study to these leaders and their campaigns as to produce books that are most complete in their comprehension of all the elements of history, and most accurate in detail. Col. Henderson's *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* as a narrative of Jackson's campaigns, and a study of the strategy of that military genius, is the most complete and detailed ever written. No American writer has produced so full and thorough a discussion and history of Jackson and his campaigns as this accomplished English officer.

The same may be said of Captain Battine's book. No book to this time has given so comprehensive and so accurate a narrative of the Gettysburg campaign, from the standpoint of the impartial historian. Of Henderson it may be said that he had become convinced of the justice of the cause of the Southern Confederacy, and was an enthusiastic admirer of Stonewall Jackson and of the Southern soldiery which followed Jackson. But Captain Battine announces no judgment of the righteousness of the contest on either side. There is a well-guarded reserve as to his convictions and his sympathies. With an impartiality that is we believe unbroken, he studies with great fairness the whole campaign, from the standpoint of a military student and critic. With the politics of the great conflict he has nothing to do, and of neither side is he a partisan. It is one of the great values of this book that it is the work of an author who is neither Northern nor Southern, who has not committed himself to a judgment on the great question at issue, and who is